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The Wisconsin Conservation Congress Announces its Earn-A-Buck Alternative Proposal

Waldo, WI – The Wisconsin Conservation Congress has released an alternative season framework proposal for the fall deer seasons, beginning in 2010. Yesterday, the Natural Resources Board (NRB) authorized a proposal for public hearing. Those hearings will be held around the state in late October, and early November. The Congress proposal will not be a formal part of the hearings. However, it is hoped that citizens attending the hearings will advocate for the Congress' proposal, or components of the Congress' proposal which they support.

“The message that we want to send to the public is that they need to get out and attend those hearings, and that they should not consider the NRB proposal to be a last and final offer,” stated Congress Chair Ed Harvey. “We hope that if enough constructive dialog takes place at the hearings, the Natural Resources Board will be looking at a broad set of solid options when the final rule is written for their consideration in December”.

Both the NRB and Congress proposals would replace Earn-a-Buck (EAB) with an increase in the number of gun deer and archery hunting days. The NRB proposal includes a statewide 16 day regular gun season which would begin two Saturdays before Thanksgiving. The 16 day season, a five day October antlerless hunt, and other increased hunting days would apply in all deer management units, including those units which are 30% or more below goal.

The Congress' proposal includes a later 16 day season, and other increased hunting days. However, this 16 day season would only occur in deer management units where hunters are unable to control the deer population with a regular deer season. In deer management units where the deer herd is at or below goal, the deer seasons would remain unchanged from what hunters consider the current "regular" deer season framework. The Congress' complete proposal is listed below.

These alternatives come on the heels of a frustrating deer season. Hunters reported seeing fewer deer and the DNR admitted that initial deer herd projections going into the 2009 were a bit high, and were later lowered to account for changes in fawn recruitment and other factors. Last year's deer season appeared to leave a lot of hunters disappointed. This disappointment led to large audiences at the Congress' Big Game Committee meeting in December, and even larger crowds at a hearing at the state capitol.

"Hunters said loud and clear, that they were fed up with Earn-a-Buck," stated Rob Bohmann, Congress Vice-Chairman and the Chair of the Congress' Deer 2000 Review Ad-hoc Committee, the committee formed to look at EAB alternatives and other deer management issues. "As a result the DNR and the NRB took EAB off the table for a year and the NRB asked the various deer stakeholders in the state to come up with an alternative tool that is just as effective, but is more publically acceptable."

The NRB selected a committee made up of representatives from a number of organizations, including the Congress, to come up with an alternative. After long hours and numerous meetings the group did come up with an alternative package, but there was not consensus, rather a vote was taken and a primary and secondary package emerged. The DNR developed a proposal based on the work of that committee.

"In order to provide feedback to the NRB committee, I authorized the formation of an ad-hoc committee," said Harvey. "Their charge was to provide input into the process through our representative on the committee, but I also asked them to look at some of the larger issues that are frustrating hunters, such as overwinter goals and enhancements to the DNR's deer population estimation tools."

The Congress ad-hoc committee reviewed the DNR's proposal. Based on feed back from Congress delegates and the public, the Committee felt that the proposal was too aggressive in areas that are currently at or below goal. In addition, initial feedback to the Committee is that the proposal from the Department didn't

meet the goal of being more publicly acceptable. Therefore, the Congress committee felt that it needed to offer up an alternative proposal that will be introduced as testimony at the public hearings later this fall.

“When the Board asked for an alternative to EAB we took that charge seriously,” stated Harvey. “Our ad-hoc committee looked at finding alternatives to replace EAB in units that need herd control. They didn’t try to fix what wasn’t broken in the units where a nine-day season and additional antlerless permits are keeping the population in check. Additionally, the NRB proposal includes a number of special seasons, like an October muzzleloader season, which have no real value in reducing the herd. It is not appropriate that this process should have been used to introduce proposals of this nature. That is what the Spring Hearings are for. This process is to find alternatives to EAB that are as efficient as heard control and which are also acceptable to hunters. We felt that we needed to propose a compromise that tries to offer both.”

The Congress proposal includes the following:

- In Deer Management Units (DMU) that are at or below goal, the season would remain unchanged, except that the archery season would remain open during the 9-day deer gun season.
- In DMU that cannot get to within 20% of goal with a regular season and antlerless permits, the following season would be in place:
 - Archery season runs continuous from the Saturday nearest September 15th through January 31st (during firearm deer seasons and muzzleloader seasons, archers would be required to wear blaze orange and the archery season would be closed the Friday before the 16-day gun deer season)
 - Two-day youth gun deer hunt that occurs on the second weekend in October
 - 16-day gun deer season beginning on Saturday prior to the Thanksgiving Holiday
 - 7-day muzzleloader season that begins on the Monday immediately following the 16-day gun deer Season
 - 4-day December antlerless only gun deer season beginning on the Thursday immediately following the 7-day muzzleloader season (anyone with a valid antlerless deer carcass tag is eligible to participate)
 - In Herd Control Units south of Highway 64 there would also be a 10-day (either sex) gun deer holiday hunt that begins on December 26th and continues for 10 consecutive days (anyone with valid deer carcass tags and appropriate license is eligible to participate)

The congress also proposes that the entire package would sunset in three years, if it is not renewed.

“Our committee and the over 130 delegates that responded to our survey felt that the tradition of an opening day prior to Thanksgiving was important,” stated Bohmann. “They also believed that if we want to promote youth deer hunting that the kids should have their own separate weekend. Finally, this package takes a chapter from the CWD zone and offers herd control opportunities over the holidays. This is less objectionable than an October antlerless hunt and based on statistics from last year, is effective in promoting the harvest of antlerless deer.”

Public hearings are slated for late October and early November. The NRB will be reviewing the results of the hearings and the DNR’s final proposal for the 2010 deer season at their December Board meeting.

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